



1 Corinthians

Chapters 11:1-13:13

The church in Corinth needed correction.

Their letter to Paul and reports that Paul receives indicate a growing divergence between the church in Corinth and Paul. Paul’s return letter (1 Corinthians) is written to address these concerns he hears about them and the concerns they have about him. The letter divides into these two main concerns. He first addresses the concerning reports he has heard about them in chapters 1-6. Then in chapters 7-15, he addresses the several questions and concerns that they have about Paul and his teachings to them.

The crux of the Corinthian error in beliefs and practice was the intersection of their understanding of Spirit and Body. In this letter, Paul addresses both major subjects using the two controlling paradigms of Temple of the Lord (1-6) and Body of Christ (7-15).

The Literary Structure of 1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians		Chapters 1-16
Letter Opening		1:1-9
Responding to Reports: Violations against the Temple of the Lord (1-6)	Violations against the Unity of the Temple of God—Divisions caused by False Wisdom	1:10-4:20
	Violations against the Sanctity of the Temple—Sexual Immorality and Lawsuits	5:1-6:20
Responding to Concerns about Paul and his Teachings—Bodies and the Body of Christ (7-15)	The Sexual Body: Marriage and Sex	7:1-40
	Food for the Body	8:1-11:1
	Expressions of the Body in Worship	11:2-16
	The Sacrament of the Body of Christ: The Lord’s Supper	11:17-34
	The Church as Body: Spiritual Gifts	12:1-14:40
	Resurrection of the Body	15:1-58
Letter Conclusion		16:1-24

What does it mean to be a Spiritual Person? In the first 6 chapters, Paul explains that we are to see ourselves as the Temple of the Lord—temple that is not to be destroyed or defiled.



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Paul concludes the first section of the letter with this statement:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Cor. 6:19-20

The body is the temple of the Spirit. Thus, Paul has provided a controlling principle to help govern life in the body: "you are not your own, for you were bought with a price." In chapters 7-15, Paul will expand on what it means to glorify God in our bodies.

As Paul addresses the body of Christ and the call to "glorify God with our bodies," he considers several practical matters of body life. First, he tackles questions of individual embodied existence as Christians who have already oriented our lives toward the "age to come" but are still living an embodied existence in "this age" which will pass away. The Corinthians had try adopt an ethic as if the age to come was fully realized in them. This theological error became practically manifest in individual members of the Corinthian church showing confusion concerning marriage and sexuality (7:1-40) and problems concerning food sacrificed in pagan temples (8:1-11:1). What does it mean to say that we are still "in this world" but should not live "of this world".

Their confusion over body, spirit and end times was also affecting their common life in worship. Certain women had begun to blur the differences between men and women (11:2-16), they had displayed improper treatment of the Lord's supper (11:17-34), and had placed an over emphasis on the ecstatic gifts such as speaking tongues (12:1-14:40).

Expressions of the Body in Worship (11:2-16)

This section is particularly difficult to understand because we do not know precisely what expressions were taking place in worship by the eschatological women. These were women who saw themselves as already having attained the fullness of the resurrection. As Paul and Jesus taught, they rightly were recognizing their equality and freedom in Christ. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he wrote:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. --Galatians 3:28

However, it would appear from the issues raised in the letter that certain women were as a sign of their freedom, they were coming out from under the spiritual "covering" of their husbands in exercising the gifts of prayer and prophecy in corporate worship. He is careful to reassert the equality under God and the interdependence of men and women (11:12). The issue seems to be that like the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols, the exercise of women's freedom in boldness was creating contention with in the body between the sexes. Paul warns against such contentiousness.



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The Sacrament of the Body of Christ: The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)

The Corinthians arrogance over their super spiritual state was also affecting the manner in which they partook of the Lord's Supper:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. --1 Cor. 11:27

What does it mean to eat and drink in "an unworthy manner"? Paul had raised two concerns, one there were divisions and factions among them, and some were putting their own selfish appetites ahead of the body--even to the point of some of the poorer members of the church not being able to participate in the common meal.

We see a continuation of the pattern. There is a marked arrogance and self-centeredness among individual members of the church, which in Paul's perspective failed to recognize the "body of Christ". A body is not the individual members but the whole. To this theme he now turns in earnest as he addresses the theme of Spiritual gifts and speaking in tongues.

The Church as Body: Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)

The Corinthians had exalted the Spiritual gift of speaking in ecstatic speech to be the defining mark of the "Spiritual". In exalting this one gift among their membership, they had neglected, discouraged and even despised the many other gifts that God gives to the Body of Christ. Staying with the paradigm of body, Paul describes the church like the human body with many different and important parts, all interdependent and equally as vital to the other.

And so Paul is now ready to address the fundamental problem in the Corinthian Church at its root. The church in its arrogance concerning knowledge and wisdom, in its assertion of "rights and freedoms" to the neglect of the weaker brethren, marital commitments and cultural norms had really proven that they were simply spiritually immature. So Paul turns to his most clear exposition on what it means to be spiritually mature. He calls the church to follow in the "most excellent way of love" (1 Cor. 13).

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. --1 Cor. 13:1-7



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Just because a person or group is spiritually "gifted" does not mean that they are spiritually mature. In considering themselves as "super spiritual", the Corinthians had actually shown themselves to be "envious, boastful, arrogant and rude". In insisting on their "own way" they had violated Christ's way of love.

Moreover, in their focus on lesser gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues as if they were signs of the age to come, they really were finding security in things of "this age" that will "pass away" (13:8) Human knowledge and wisdom in this age is partial.

They were really just behaving like "children" following "childish ways" which they should rightly place behind them:

When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 1 Cor. 13:11

The primary expression of the resurrected age will be the expression of love. If the Corinthian Christians truly desire to orient their lives to their future hope, it will be a marked orientation to the way of love.